1. Introduction: the aim and structure of the book

Failure is a predictor of success. This is, without question, one of life's great ironies. And it has deep roots into the evolution of life. And it is, without hesitation, simply true. (Geher, 2015)

The challenge is to turn a negative experience into a productive one – that is, to counter adversity with resilience. Psychological resilience is the capacity to respond quickly and constructively to crises. It's a central dynamic in most survival stories, such as those of the shell-shocked individuals and organizations that rallied in the wake of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. (Margolis and Stoltz, 2010, p. 87)

RESILIENCE: A LARGELY (MIS-)USED TERM?

Organizational contexts are becoming growingly unstable and equivocal, increasingly as likely to host unforeseen and adverse events as to promote those that are uplifting. When crises and tragedies occur, whether the subject concerns an individual recovering from a trauma, an organization attempting to moderate the effect of a scandal, or a community returning to normality after a natural disaster or terrorist attack, they are globally broadcast by multiple media. In each case, the responses are frequently framed in terms of ‘resilience’.

What, exactly, resilience denotes is less clear (for example, is it a ‘quality’ or a process? See Box 1.1 and Box 1.3 below). Resilience has become part of contemporary managerial jargon and, as such, it is often misinterpreted or misused.1 When authorities and commentators are not quite sure what to say when they report on misadventure and some action or comment is called for, in these contexts, organizational resilience assumes the resonances of a portmanteau term. Under these circumstances being resilient requires a capacity to hold a wide range of meanings in the situations to which it is applied (Watson, 2005).

Apart from its use as cliché, resilience is a complex phenomenon, larger in scope and more powerful in its effects than many other similar terms, such as resistance, reaction or recovery. Generally speaking, resilience...
RESILIENCE ‘BASICS’ FROM A NON-ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

For a non-academic perspective about resilience, you may consider the ‘Resilience’ entry on the Psychology Today website (https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/resilience). Resilience is defined as follows:

Resilience is that ineffable quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back stronger than ever. Rather than letting failure overcome them and drain their resolve, they find a way to rise from the ashes. Psychologists have identified some of the factors that make someone resilient, among them a positive attitude, optimism, the ability to regulate emotions, and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback. Even after misfortune, resilient people are blessed with such an outlook that they are able to change course and soldier on.

On 12 March 2018, texts and posts with suggestive titles (and subtitles) such as the following were found on the Psychology Today website:

- ‘Super survival of the fittest’ (‘Ordinary people aren’t powerless in the face of tragedy and suffering; many bounce back with resilience. But some do more. They bounce forward and succeed in unimagined ways’; by David B. Feldman and Lee Daniel Kravetz, 9 June 2016).
- ‘The Art of Resilience’ (‘Research on resilience breaks down the myth that a troubled childhood leaves us emotionally crippled as an adult’; by Hara Estroff Marano, 9 June 2016).
- ‘Challenging Success-via-Failure’ (‘The Tortoise and the Hype: Yes, failing has its upside; but it’s not necessarily the one we valorize’; by Carlin Flora, 26 June 2015).
- ‘Failure as the Single Best Marker of Human Success’ (‘Glorious dandelion fields betray stories of failures. The same is true with us’; by Glenn Geher, 5 September 2014).
- ‘On the Benefits of Failure’ (‘Failure is nothing to be ashamed of!’; by Nigel Barber, 14 February 2013).

The Psychology Today website also includes links to several resilience blogs with headings such as A Widow’s Guide to Healing, Finding Meaning in Life’s Struggles, It’s OK That You’re Not OK, Resilient Leadership, The Resilient Brain and What Doesn’t Kill Us.
connotes capacities to absorb external shocks and to learn from them, while simultaneously preparing for and responding to external jolts, whether as organizations, teams or individuals. Resilience is claimed to be necessary to protect actors and agencies from shocks, crises, scandals and business fiascos that generate fear and create dissonance. Resilient people and organizations get knocked down and get up again, ready to learn from events and to be ready for future challenges: the ultimate connotation of resilience.

In abstract terms, resilience seems to be expressed by Nietzsche’s (1889 [1968]) famous aphorism: ‘What does not destroy me, makes me stronger’. As remarked by Clair and Dufresne (2007), resilience can also refer to the Mahayana Buddhism expression, ‘changing poison [that is, unhappiness and unfortunate circumstances] into medicine’ (happiness and improvement). The expression, coined by the scholar Nagarjuna (Jones, 2014), living from the second to the third century, means that whenever we experience loss, failure or suffering, we have the capacity to transform suffering into joy and good fortune.

In contemporary managerial use, ‘resilience’ is a word with more than a little totemism implicit in it. If not exactly worshipped or deified, it is certainly lauded as something that leaders and managers are expected to nurture and cultivate. In the context of organizations, being resilient suggests that these high priests of resilience, leaders and managers, can turn toxicity and damage from a crisis into ‘substantial learning and improved, rather than damaged, performance’ (Clair and Dufresne, 2007, p. 63). In practice, resilience entails not only resisting stressors but also learning from them. With this learning, we shall argue, the totemic magic that often attaches to the cult of leadership can be demystified by cultivating means to be resilient, leading to a more enlightened and less enchanted view of the matter.

Taylor (2017) reports several examples of leadership that is not enchanted with its own myths. James Quincey, immediately after having become President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Coca-Cola Co. (on 1 May 2017):

called upon rank-and-file managers to get beyond the fear of failure that had dogged the company since the ‘New Coke’ fiasco so many years ago. ‘New Coke’ was the unofficial name for the reformulated ‘new taste of Coca-Cola’, which became ‘Coke II’ in 1992, and was finally discontinued in July 2002. ‘If we’re not making mistakes,’ Quincey insisted, ‘we’re not trying hard enough.’ (p. 3)

The same spirit of not being disenchanted by failure appears to animate successful companies such as Netflix and Amazon, whose CEOs defend the ultimate success of their businesses as being able to learn from failures (Taylor, 2017).
In a paradoxical contrast with the idea of ‘failure as a predictor of success’, continued success may threaten the pain from which future plentitude can arise, phoenix-like in its resilience. Non-resilient (vulnerable) individuals, teams and organizations enjoying a streak of constant success may be doomed to fail as a result of hubris (see, for example, Box 5.4 in Chapter 5). Successful ventures can easily trigger the hubris of leaders. They may develop overoptimism and overconfidence. They might also push their organizations towards aggressive growth strategies or undertake overpriced acquisitions, triggering leadership failures eventually destroying the organization (Kroll et al., 2000). ‘Success is toxic’, Nokia’s Chairman Risto Siilasmaa explained; failure – or the fear of failure – may be critical for success (The Economist, 2018).

If resilience must not be deified, then neither should it be reified. Peremptory statements such as ‘Risk is inevitable. Resilience is everything’ (Thomson, 2017), the title of an article published in Forbes magazine, must be regarded with caution. Much as most studies do, this article emphasizes the ‘bright side’ of resilience. However, some recent contributions also chart its potentially ‘dark side’, when ‘too much of a good thing can be a bad thing’ (Chamorro-Premuzic and Lusk, 2017; Williams et al., 2017). An extreme concern for resilience may induce people to become overly persistent in seeking to achieve unattainable goals. An extreme focus on resilience may make people overly tolerant of adversity, and of unpleasant or counterproductive circumstances such as putting up with boring or demoralizing jobs, toxic bosses or dangerous working conditions. Adam Grant epitomized this idea in his commencement speech at Utah State University, in May 2017 (Box 1.2).

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

We wrote this book on the basis of a systematic academic literature review (see the Appendix) with which we sought to delineate the diversity, contradictions and conflicts related to the heterogeneity of the disciplinary fields, metaphors and analogies used in discussing resilience. The book explores and illuminates such contradictions, rather than refuting them, in order to provide readers with more solid and perhaps more sceptical grounds for decisions. In articulating organizational resilience, rather than merely reporting what the extant literature has already produced, this book aims to present concepts, offering insights that stimulate critical thinking. We propose two innovative perspectives, namely, a multi-level diffusion model, and a dialectical interpretation of resilience.

Chapter 2 discusses the origins and applications of thinking about...
resilience in various fields and in various forms of human agglomeration. Resilience can appear in two differentiated ways: as an adaptive or as a reactive response to external jolts and stressors. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce, respectively, individual and collective resilience, on the basis that resilience can be found, understood and nurtured at different levels of aggregation (from individuals to collectivities, from citizens to communities, from employees to teams, from teams to organizations). These chapters elaborate the differences between resilience and other related constructs, emphasizing shared antecedents, processes and effects (see also Luthar, 2006).

Chapter 5 clarifies what characterizes individual, team and organizational resilience, and describes how resilience might be built and nurtured. This chapter also discusses the interplay of resilience at individual, team and organization levels, demonstrating that interdependence between these different levels appears to be a constitutive property of overall organizational resilience. The multi-level model proposed shows how resilience can

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**BOX 1.2 IS RESILIENCE LIKE A VITAMIN?**

A great philosopher named Aristotle thought virtues were like Vitamin D. Too little of a virtue is bad, but so is too much. He believed that every virtue lies between vices of deficiency and excess. Too little humor is dry; too much is silly. Too little pride makes us meek; too much breeds narcissism. Too much self-restraint leaves you doing homework while your friends are tailgating [i.e., partying in car parks at concerts and sporting events]. Too little self-restraint means you’ll really regret eating that fourth Scotsman Dog . . . You need resilience to stay generous on the days when you lose faith in humanity. You need resilience to stay true to yourself on the days when others lose faith in you. And you need resilience to persevere on the days when you lose faith in yourself. But if you’re too obsessed with any of these virtues, you might undermine your own resilience. Virtues can be a little bit like vitamins. Vitamins are essential for health. But what if you get more than your body needs? If you take too much Vitamin C, it won’t hurt you. If you overdose on Vitamin D, though, it can do serious harm: you could wind up with kidney problems.

This is an excerpt from Adam Grant’s commencement speech at Utah State University, May 2017. Do you agree with Grant that to be resilient, one must not be ‘too virtuous’? Why? Can you identify any virtue or psychological strength for which more is always better?
be spread within organizational settings and beyond, and how, at the same
time, collective resilience can make individuals more resilient. Chapter 6
presents a dialectical interpretation emphasizing synthesis between proac-
tive and reactive resilience. Contrasting forces constitute resilience (that is,
adaptation versus anticipation, solidity versus adaptability, control versus
innovation, and so on): innovative syntheses can occur between contradic-
tory elements. Finally, Chapter 7 paves the way for future research.

Overall, with this book, we aim to reach the following goals:

● To illuminate the meaning of resilience.
● To distinguish it from other concepts with which it shares similarities.
● To articulate a cross-level diffusion model of organizational resilience
  and its enabling interactive components.
● To present a dialectical understanding of the resilience process, one
  in which resilience is the synthesis of reaction and adaptation.

As we will discuss, resilience will be presented not as the product of
the application of any sort of recipe but rather as the ongoing pursuit of
opposite processes of zooming in and out, seeing the macroscopic and the
microscopic, being supportive and demanding, caring as much about the
future as the present. Resilience is not a steady trait, is not a superpower;
instead, it entails a constant process (see Box 1.3 and Box 1.4) of trim-
ing and perfecting by which individuals and organizations (as well as
other human collectivities) aim to perfect themselves while knowing that
at some points they will fail. Failures are critical for further improving
systems.

Resilience does not accept failure passively. While to err is human, being
complacent about (preventable) error is unwise. Therefore, resilience uses
small errors to prevent big ones; when unavoidable errors do occur, it
regards them as events from which to learn, on the principle that we learn
from exposure to poisons by building resistance to them. As the phrase
attributed to Paracelsus explains, ‘the dose makes the poison’ (sola dosis
facit venenum), a central adage of toxicology. Not only toxicology but also
business: OutSystems, a global enterprise software company, espouses the
following rule (OutSystems, 2013):

Fail Fast, Fail Cheap. At OutSystems errors are acceptable. How are you going
to learn if you don’t make mistakes? Just make sure that you learn from those
mistakes and that those mistakes do not end up in a major crisis. Fail fast and
fail cheaply, but don’t be afraid of trying. Be proactive.

Individuals, teams, organizations and communities seeking resilience must
be aware that they need to experience small doses of venom to build
protection to its poison. Therefore, to gain resilience organizations must to some extent make themselves vulnerable.

Dear reader, you may be alarmed at the prospect of being advised to undergo a little poisoning. That one never knows what the dose should be that builds resilience is one of the challenges involved in its construction:

Introduction

**BOX 1.3 THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (APA) GUIDE FOR RESILIENCE**

‘The Road to Resilience’

On the American Psychological Association (APA) website, you may find *The Road to Resilience* guide (http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx) where relevant materials are available. Resilience is defined as follows: ‘Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences’.

We suggest that you read the text ‘10 ways to build resilience’ (http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx). The ten ways are as follows: (1) ‘Make connections’; (2) ‘Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems’; (3) ‘Accept that change is a part of living’; (4) ‘Move toward your goals’; (5) ‘Take decisive actions’; (6) ‘Look for opportunities for self-discovery’; (7) ‘Nurture a positive view of yourself’; (8) ‘Keep things in perspective’; (9) ‘Maintain a hopeful outlook’; (10) ‘Take care of yourself’. Several other texts in the *The Road to Resilience* guide are interesting, especially for non-scholarly audiences.

**Resilience – A Process or a Quality?**

Note that while *Psychology Today* defines resilience as a quality (Box 1.1), the APA defines it as a process. We suggest that you reflect on the difference between resilience as a process or a quality, thinking about the implications of each definition. Even if we assume that resilience is a quality, a question arises: is it a stable quality or a developable one?

Reflect about the consequences of each assumption. Think about why Caza and Milton (2012, p.895) define resilience at work as ‘a positive developmental trajectory characterized by demonstrated competence in the face of, and professional growth after experiences of adversity in the workplace’. What do you think they mean by ‘trajectory’? Is it possible to experience both upward and downward trajectories? What factors may influence such trajectories?
In 2015, when Sheryl Sandberg (Chief Operating Officer of Facebook) and her husband were on vacation he died suddenly from a cardiac arrhythmia. She shared her traumatic experience (Sandberg, 2017) in the *New York Times*, in a beautiful text that we consider worth reading. If you don’t have access to the article, read the following excerpts (p. A23):

Flying home to tell my 7-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son that their father had died was the worst experience of my life. During that unimaginable trip, I turned for advice to a friend who counsels grieving children. She said that the most important thing was to tell my kids over and over how much I loved them and that they were not alone. In the fog of those early and brutal weeks and months, I tried to use the guidance she had given me. My biggest fear was that my children’s happiness would be destroyed by our devastating loss. I needed to know what, if anything, I could do to get them through this.

She also explained how she had dealt with her children’s feelings:

One afternoon, I sat down with my kids to write out ‘family rules’ to remind us of the coping mechanisms we would need. We wrote together that it’s OK to be sad and to take a break from any activity to cry. It’s OK to be happy and laugh. It’s OK to be angry and jealous of friends and cousins who still have fathers. It’s OK to say to anyone that we do not want to talk about it now. And it’s always OK to ask for help. The poster we made that day – with the rules written by my kids in colored markers – still hangs in our hall so we can look at it every day. It reminds us that our feelings matter and that we are not alone.

For the purposes of this book, her ‘conclusion’ is worth considering, not only by parents but by all of us:

As parents, teachers and caregivers, we all want to raise resilient kids – to develop their strength so they can overcome obstacles big and small. Resilience leads to better health, greater happiness and more success. The good news is that resilience isn’t a fixed personality trait; we’re not born with a set amount of it. Resilience is a muscle we can help kids build.

You may also read an article published in *Time* magazine (Luscombe, 2017) about the tragic event and how Sandberg made the decision to help others to find a way through grief (including through writing *Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy*, co-authored by Adam Grant; Sandberg and Grant,
Too much poison, and the organization intoxicates itself (for example, by assuming too much risk).

Too little poison, and the organization will perish in contact with danger (for example, due to lack of preparation to deal with risks).

TOOLS

The text of this book is splashed here and there by boxes, which are used to invite you, our reader, to reflect on yourself and the surrounding reality. Four types of boxes, marked with small icons, are included: (1) tools or measures; (2) illustrations and examples; (3) questions used as ‘food for thought’; and (4) ‘for practice’ exercises.

Tools, or measures, are intended to help you measure some characteristics related to resilience.

Illustrations aim to connect the abstract concepts with some reality that puts them in context.

Questions for reflection (or ‘food for thought’) are aimed at asking questions that might be funny and rewarding for you to explore on your own.

2017). Take notice of how Sandberg recovered through sharing her feelings with friends and family (and the public in general; see her Facebook post on https://www.facebook.com/shery/posts/10155617891025177:0), asking for help and advice, and receiving unconditional support from her boss, Mark Zuckerberg.
'For practice’ exercises are indications that might be useful for translating the ideas discussed in the book to the reader’s reality.

We hope these additions to the standard book layout will render exploring this book more interesting. We trust that you will enjoy the experience!

NOTES

1. During the writing of this book, probably under the effect of hallucinations and other obsessive symptoms that academic writing can generate, one of the authors noticed that (skin) resilience was also reported as one of the effects that his body wash was promising.
2. Clair and Dufresne (2007) label as ‘hyper-resilience’ the situation in which ‘the crisis becomes a catalyst for positive transformation’ (p. 99).